



House Select Committee on Homeland Security **Democrats**

JIM TURNER, Ranking Member

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TURNER: SECURITY CHECKS FOR VISA WAIVER TRAVELERS

Congressman Jim Turner, Ranking Member of the House Select Committee on Homeland Security, introduced a bill today that would require foreign visitors traveling without a visa to be checked against terrorist watchlists and government databases before being permitted to travel to the United States.

By requiring this biographical check, the bill would close security gaps that have been identified by the Department of Homeland Security's Office of the Inspector General in the Visa Waiver Program, which permits visitors from 27 countries to travel to the United States without obtaining a visa or being checked in any way until they have already boarded flights or cruise ships traveling to the United States.

To increase security in the program, Congress enacted legislation following the September 11 attacks requiring visa waiver countries to develop passports with biometric identifiers by October, 2004. The Administration has requested a two year extension of this deadline and the House of Representatives will today consider legislation (H.R. 4417) to provide a one-year extension of this deadline.

“We must make the Visa Waiver Program more secure. Right now, there are no security features in the Visa Waiver Program that prevent terrorists or criminals who have obtained a valid or fraudulent passport from traveling to the United States. Security checks should be conducted for visa waiver travelers before they are allowed to board planes or ships headed to the United States,” said Turner.

The SECURE Visa Waiver Act requires that the Department of Homeland Security implement a program that would electronically check travelers coming to the United States on the Visa Waiver Program. The bill also responds to the Administration's request for an extension of the biometric passport deadline by providing a one-year extension and giving the Secretary of Homeland Security authority to provide limited additional time to countries that have almost met the biometric passport requirements.

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